

Isaiah 64 5b-12 July 14

**Isaiah 64:5-12 (NKJV)**

**5 You meet him who rejoices and does righteousness, *Who* remembers You in Your ways.**

**You are indeed angry, for we have sinned-- In these ways we continue; And we need to be saved.**

**6 But we are all like an unclean *thing*, And all our righteousnesses *are* like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away.**

**7 And *there is* no one who calls on Your name, Who stirs himself up to take hold of You; For You have hidden Your face from us, And have consumed us because of our iniquities. /**

**8 But now, O LORD, You *are* our Father; We *are* the clay, and You our potter; And all we *are* the work of Your hand.**

**9 Do not be furious, O LORD, Nor remember iniquity forever; Indeed, please look--we all *are* Your people!**

**10 Your holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation.**

**11 Our holy and beautiful temple, Where our fathers praised You, Is burned up with fire; And all our pleasant things are laid waste.**

**12 Will You restrain Yourself because of these *things*, O LORD? Will You hold Your peace, and afflict us very severely?**

Last week we looked at God's promises and His willingness to be close to us. We saw that any relationship with God that we need God offers to supply. And we explored the reality that all of the problems with our relationship with God are on our side.

We took a look at this outline-

In 63:15 and 16 Isaiah longs for the love of God and then laments in verses 17-19 our hard heartedness.

In 64:1-5a Isaiah longs for the presence of God and then, where we begin today, he laments over our long standing sins in verse 5b-7

In 64: 8 and 9 Isaiah longs for the touch of God and in 10-12 He appeals to God for Him to respond.

How dearly we should cling to the truths Isaiah presented to us last week. And this is doubly true because of the truth he reveals this week.

Isaiah is going to give us a crash course in our condition before God if left to our own efforts. It is a picture of utter futility. Praise God this is not the only passage in the Bible or we would be left in despair.

**5b You are indeed angry, for we have sinned-- In these ways we continue; And we need to be saved.**

God has brought to my attention recently that, while **love** might move us to **anger**, **anger** will never move us to **love**. And I have had to repent of thinking that I know far more about people than I really do. I have always advised believers when dealing with other believers to lead with questions. And I have, instead, responded based on **assumptions** that I did not test. And that is not how I want others to treat me. So I should not treat others like that. Anger is not always a bad thing. But it quickly goes bad in our sinful condition.

But **God's anger** has no such flaws. When God is angry it is always **justified**. When God acts in anger, it is always **deserved**. Now last week we looked at how we can have closeness to God. And it came down to being real with God, telling Him the truth, and calling out to Him to come to us.

This week we can answer, "How can I make God angry?" And it is really really simple. Continue in the ways that He forbids.

**Keep doing the things** that God's Word says you **must not do**, and keep **not** doing the things that God's Word says that **you must do**. That is how to make God angry.

Now, do you want to make your Christian life complicated? All you need to do is imagine that God has a different response to **YOUR** sin. You may believe that God **hates** sin in general, but all you need to do is just imagine that He will **pity you** when **you sin** because you are so helpless against it. Then you will not understand why God will not draw close to you. You will not be able to interpret His discipline. God will soon be someone you really don't want to have much to do with. Because He is so uncaring. He is so arbitrary, so fickle, so undependable.

Scripture is pretty clear about the two extremes. First faith believes that **God rewards** those who diligently seek Him. Second He is **angered** by those who knowingly **sin against Him**. If we believe the opposite about either of those two things we will never be able to make sense of our relationship to God. If we believe that **God does not reward those who are faithful to Him** or if we believe **our our sin does not anger God** we will remain befuddled by God. By **conformity** to those two truths in our relationship with God, our relationship with God makes more sense. There is more truth to be known

about our relationship with God than **this**. But these are starting points that we have to have solid in our minds.

So in our text. God is angry at His people. That is a bad place to be.

The people deserved it because they have continued in sin.

And those people needed to be saved.

This is pretty much the starting point for all humanity. This is a universal truth. People have gone their own way and deserve God's wrath. And if God does not save them, they will not be saved.

So we need saved. And there is a tremendous obstacle. And what is that obstacle? **Us. We** are the problem. **What we are** at the core of our being is the problem. It provides us with the insurmountable but in verse 6.

**<sup>6</sup> But we are all like an unclean *thing*, And all our righteousnesses *are like filthy rags*; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away.**

Isaiah uses 4 comparisons to show us the problem. The NKJV uses the word "like" 3 times and "as" 1 time. And by the time the verse ends the case is closed. We see how hopeless it is to depend **upon us** to save us **from us**.

First we are like an **unclean thing**.

The word for unclean is used often in the Old Testament. It is something in the state of defilement that was prohibited from being allowed into God's presence in worship.

**Leviticus 5:2 (NKJV)**

**<sup>2</sup> Or if a person touches any unclean thing, whether *it is* the carcass of an unclean beast, or the carcass of unclean livestock, or the carcass of unclean creeping things, and he is unaware of it, he also shall be unclean and guilty.**

Remember also how the lepers had to yell out "unclean, unclean" when anyone approached them?

Now it is interesting that Isaiah does not say we are like someone **defiled by** an unclean thing. No. It says we are like the unclean thing itself. The problem with us is not what **was done to us**. The problem is that **which is in us**. The problem is the defilement that comes out of us like Jesus said.

**Matthew 15:16-20 (NKJV)**

**<sup>16</sup> So Jesus said, "Are you also still without understanding?"**

**<sup>17</sup> Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated?**

**<sup>18</sup> But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man.**

**<sup>19</sup> For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries,**

**fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.**

**<sup>20</sup> These are *the things* which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man."**

We truly are the defiling presence. If one of us were to enter eternity **as we are** we would need to be declaring for an eternity- "unclean, unclean" due to our old sin natures. We would need to protect all those **who are perfect** from the impurity that we carry. We would need to warn them not to come into our presence because we will defile them. That is the perspective we are to have about the source of the problem.

There is a sense that all of us have the capacity to **mess up each other's lives**. We carry the muscle memory of our old nature. We find it easy to **deceive ourselves** and hence to **deceive each other**. We find it is easy to **trust ourselves** and hence to **distrust God's Word**. We find it easy to do what **serves our selfish interest** and hence to not do that which serves a **brother's self interest**. We carry an enormous capacity to do harm to each other. Maybe we should start any conversation by saying, "The first thing I want you to understand is that I am unclean."

That is the first "like". Here is the second. And, as God often does, He leads Isaiah to use graphic imagery that is offensive to us.

**And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags**

The language used here is very specific. He is speaking of women's menstrual cloths. Didn't God know that the Bible would be read in church? Why does He choose such graphic imagery? And the point is always that He uses strong images to make strong points.

Immediately nearly everyone would have a very clear understanding of the place those rags would take in day to day life. They were nothing that would be displayed with pride. They were nothing that would be proudly spoken of. They were a source of uncleanness. They were to be discretely kept hidden. They were to be cleaned as soon and as thoroughly as possible.

Everyone would understand that these rags will not **cover us** as much as they will, by **attempting** to cover us, **defile us**. To depend upon our good works to impress God is absurd. To think that our good will outweigh our bad is inconceivable. This basically says we would be depending upon **our bad** to outweigh **our bad**.

Now this is the point we must get before we understand the enormity of our salvation. This does not say that our failures and sins are like filthy rags. It does not say **our sins** are like filthy rags. It does not say that when we are not working at our best this is what we are like. No, what this is saying that the

absolute best that we can do, apart from a relationship with Christ, is like filthy rags.

Now we might say, wait a minute. Many people who do not even know about Christ or have chosen not to follow Christ do wonderful things. Don't they provide free medical practices for those in poverty? Don't they sacrifice themselves for their fellow soldiers in war situations? Don't they take care of the homeless at great cost to themselves? Don't they provide for the less fortunate in all areas of the world? And if we are to tell the truth, we would have to say "yes". Unregenerate human beings provide some very noble works of humanitarian service. The things they do can be extremely useful. And in some senses it cannot be denied that they have a good effect. And they are, in some real senses, good things.

But in the sense of **proving our goodness to God** they completely **fall flat**. In Isaiah's other imagery it would be like the unfaithful wife who has been off brazenly and indiscriminately chasing all her other loves. Then comes home and offers to spend a night with her husband. The act that conforms to God's law is done in a heart of rebellion and defiance to what God truly wants. It cannot please God. It can only offend Him. The whole relationship is offensive. No acts of compliance will change that.

We started our text with an **angry God** and no supposed "righteous acts" on our part will please God. They will only disgust Him. And the more we think to try them, the more we defile ourselves. We need a right relationship. We need the kind of righteous robes that only God can provide. They are the ones that could never defile us. They allow us to put on a righteousness that is perfect. While it does not immediately fix everything that is wrong with us, it makes us presentable to God. At that point it is clear that we are not relying on anything of ourselves to make us presentable to God. It is only God who can make us presentable to Himself.

We have abandoned any idea of our own innate goodness or righteousness **accomplishing anything** in our relationship with God. And that is always the starting point. **Grace** is only received in its proper place when it is understood that it **cannot be deserved**. Anything other than that is not grace, it is merit. And our merit will always be rejected by God as a tribute to our own pride that we are trying to offer to God. It does not worship **God**. It worships **self**. And it only reveals how fully couched in filthy rags it really is. Matthew Henry says this:

**We have all by sin become not only obnoxious to God's justice, but odious to his holiness; for sin is that abominable thing which the Lord hates, and cannot endure to look upon. Even all our righteousnesses are**

**as filthy rags.**

Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible.

OK, so far we have seen we are like an unclean thing and our best is like filthy rags. So what other good news do we have?

**We all fade as a leaf.**

The nature of human beings is to go from life to death. We are warned about the brevity of life all through scripture. There are a lot of imageries. But at the end of the day we are all wearing out. Carla complains about how it hurts more now when she hurts herself. I let her know that this is what most mortals feel.

We are all growing older. We are fading. And as such we are not to be ultimately relied upon. When we place our ultimate faith and dependence upon a human, we are betting on a faulty plan. That person is certain to die. We are only betting that we will die before them. And that is not a safe bet. All of us are headed toward physical failure. It is a certainty. The only thing uncertain is how we will get there.

A wise person takes all of this into consideration.

**Ecclesiastes 12:1 (NKJV)**

**<sup>1</sup> Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, Before the difficult days come, And the years draw near when you say, "I have no pleasure in them":**

Then he continues at the end of this chapter

**Ecclesiastes 12:12-14 (NKJV)**

**<sup>12</sup> And further, my son, be admonished by these. Of making many books *there is no end*, and much study *is wearisome to the flesh.***

**<sup>13</sup> Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all.**

**<sup>14</sup> For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil.**

The fact that we are headed toward physical weakness and failure in this life should wean us from **depending upon the temporary** to provide for us **the eternal**. It does not work. And it will not work. And ultimately it will just be one huge disappointment.

When God looks at us He sees that we are like an unclean thing.

Our best is like filthy rags.

And we are fading fast

Now what other point of positive thinking does Isaiah add? (sarcasm)

**And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away.**

What do you think you most need delivered from? Do you think it is your circumstances? Do you think that if your circumstances changed, you would be the person that would be most pleasing to God? How about other people's reactions to you? Do you think that if people responded better to you, you would be the person that would be most pleasing to God? That is not usually what scripture points at. What we need most delivered from is **ourselves**, and more specifically our own **proclivity** toward doing whatever it is that we most feel like doing at any specific moment in our lives. That is the great problem with us.

The problem with us is our iniquities, like the wind, **carry us** in their power to wherever that sin is headed.

This word for iniquity means twisting or perverting deliberately. These are not sins done ignorantly. This wasn't a simple missing of the mark. This is conscious wrong doing.

It is interesting that when scripture speaks of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 18 it talks of **being Led** by the Spirit. But when it talks of false doctrine it says we shouldn't be **carried by it**.

**Ephesians 4:14 (NKJV)**

**<sup>14</sup> that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,**

**1 Corinthians 12:2 (NKJV)**

**<sup>2</sup> You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led.**

Wrong thinking carries us. Have you ever listened to what another person believes and you cringed because you knew where it would carry them?

The question comes down to, are we being **carried by** the forces of sin, or are we **following** the Spirit of God?

Being carried implies something passive. Have you ever reached a time in the face of temptation or frustration or testing where you just said, I don't care.

Maybe you were disillusioned by those believers around you. Maybe you were just tired of fighting. And you said, I give up trying. I am going to **enjoy this pleasure** or **give into this temptation** or **do this thing** because it is easiest thing to do. I am tired of fighting it. I am tired of resisting it. I just want to do it. Doing it is so much easier than not doing it.

That is being carried by our iniquities. That is allowing ourselves to be carried by the prevailing wind in our lives. It is exactly the opposite of Christ who was driven by the Holy Spirit into the desert, the harshest of environments to be

tested in the harshest of realities. And He did exactly the opposite of that which his flesh **desired**, what his flesh maybe even **needed**. That is the example we are to follow. There is nothing passive about **following**. Following is active. It is difficult. It requires deciding. It requires moving. It requires commitment to the course. And it is often not at all fun. Following the Spirit will prevent you from being carried by the prevailing **sin wind**. Where do your sin winds want to take you? Is your life a steady trend of resisting those winds? Do you go there less today than you did a year ago? Or have you not drifted in your **sin-wind** for years? That is a very good sign in your life. That is reason for great confidence in your spiritual status. Obedience is one of the traits that most assures us that we are a believer. Isaiah's audience was one that was losing that battle. They were no longer fighting. They were drifting with the currents. They were going where the currents were taking them. They were perverting true spirituality and they were doing it knowingly, not caring about the consequences. And that, again, is our natural state. That is every heart that is not submitted to the one true God through the person of Jesus Christ.

There really is nothing in ourselves to commend ourselves. There is nothing there that is good. No wonder God is angry. Look at how the creation is treating their Creator.

Verse 7 continues by summing up the behavior.

**7 And there is no one who calls on Your name, Who stirs himself up to take hold of You; For You have hidden Your face from us, And have consumed us because of our iniquities.**

I know I used to talk about people in my Youth for Christ appeals saying that "young people were seeking after God but someone had to show them who God really is." I gave that up after a while. The truth is God is seeking after them or they would have zero chance.

While I have respect for many people who hold an Armenian position that says that humans have the innate capacity to respond to God's call on their lives, I simply don't understand it that way. The way it seems to me is that everyone is in this category of **those who will not call on God's name**. None stir themselves up to take hold of God. We **should**. But we are incapable due to our absolute deadness toward God, our absolute blindness toward God. Except God were to **regenerate** us, we could not **live** to make the life seeking decisions. Except God were to **open our eyes**, we could never **see** the truth of Him in order to come to Him. We need a miracle done by God before we even turn our attention toward God.

After the fall, God's face is hidden from man. There is no longer even an innate ability to see the truth about God. It is there. And we should add it up. And the ability we have to reason demands such a thing. But because it is a spiritual issue, this truth escapes us. We are responsible for responding to God. But, in and of ourselves, because of being born in Adam we cannot respond to God except that God responds to us first. He must be the first mover.

The result of what every single one of us deserves is spelled out in verse 7. You have consumed us because of our iniquities.

That is what you and I have in common with all of humanity. This is what we all deserved. But praise God that is not what we get. And why? Because of the nature of the potter.

**<sup>8</sup> But now, O LORD, You *are* our Father; We *are* the clay, and You our potter; And all we *are* the work of Your hand.**

We will look at this more next week, but here is the only answer to our dilemma. And we will look at Romans to see how that Potter cannot be figured or calculated, but He does make some pots for a glorified use. And we can know if that is us if we respond to Him in such a way that we surrender to His Lordship.

How have we done with the challenge from last week. Have we been coming to God throughout the week saying, Lord, here I am. And I will do whatever you want me to do. Anything. And have we been telling our Lord how scary that is for us to say? Have we been real with Him? God will respond to the prayers in His name. We can count on it.